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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Mexican congressional and gubernatorial elections,
2 July 1961

1. Offices to be filled: Entire membership--recently increased to 178--of National Chamber of Deputies for three-year term and governors of seven states. Legislatures in eight states and municipal governments in twelve states will also be elected on various dates in 1961.

2. Background: Because of the governing Institutional Revolutionary party's strong control, few real issues are raised in any campaign or settled by elections. Occasionally, state governors show a certain independence of action accompanied by strong local popularity which enables them to operate relatively autonomously. If the federal government believes the challenge to its power is too great, the governor is replaced.

3. Parties participating:

a. Institutional Revolutionary party (PRI):
The dominant official party whose supremacy has not been seriously challenged for over 30 years. Highly centralized and very well organized, the PRI is composed of agricultural, labor, and "popular" sectors and has right, moderate, and left wings which jockey for power during selection of candidates. Its identification with the traditionally powerful ideals of the Mexican Revolution is an essential part of its continued power and appeal.

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b. National Action party (PAN): Conservative, Catholic opposition party which has named candidates for deputy in several states and for governor in Nuevo Leon. It may also support General Topete for governor of Sonora, just to oppose the PRI candidate. The PAN appeals chiefly to the upper classes, and its candidates will probably be supported by reactionary groups like the Sinarquists and the small Nationalist party.

c. Popular Socialist party (PPS): The only registered Marxist party. It is led by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who has long been closely associated with international Communist action in Latin America and strongly backs Castro. Although the PPS probably has far fewer than the legal minimum of 75,000 members, many nonmembers are sympathetic to its program and vote for PPS candidates in protest against the PRI machine. The PPS is running congressional candidates in all but seven states, where members will support PRI candidates in line with Lombardo's present policy of cooperation with the Lopez government.

3. Outstanding personalities: With few exceptions the PRI candidates, who will win most of the elections, are party regulars who can be counted on for compliance with administration policies and are expected not to be outstanding. President Lopez Mateos, who epitomizes the party and whose powers as President are very strong and very centralized, is not expected to take a prominent part in the campaign.

a. General Lazaro Cardenas: Former president with great personal popularity among peasants and leftists who has become a willing and valuable tool of communism and Castro. He recently said that he belonged to no party, although he helped create the PRI and has long been considered the leader of its left wing. He has been increasingly critical of the moderate drift to the right of the PRI, convincing the Lopez Mateos administration it must make new appeals to leftist sentiment in order to minimize Cardenas' influence. Cardenas may use his popularity on behalf of PPS candidates or others he considers sufficiently amenable to leftist influence.

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b. General Ricardo Topete: Full-blooded Indian, popular in the Mexican northwest, who has bitterly fought PRI rejection of his candidacy for governor of Sonora. Clashes between his followers and those of other candidates as well as government forces have resulted in violence and several deaths in recent months. Topete has mixed backing from several disparate groups opposed to the PRI, possibly including Cardenas, and may press his campaign strongly, leading to further outbreaks of violence.

4. Present party strengths: The governing PRI is overwhelmingly the strongest party, and over 90 percent of the present deputies belong to it. The PRI decides how many and which opposition candidates will be declared elected in order to present a facade of opposition. This year it probably will include a few PAN and PPS deputies in the new congress. Practically all federal, state, and local offices are held by the PRI, which controls the election apparatus and propaganda media.

5. Recently there has been a new upsurge of dissatisfaction with the PRI's habit of arbitrarily imposing candidates and paying little regard to local sentiments. The party hierarchy is obsessed with the fear that a real opposition will grow up, though this would probably be best for the party itself in the long run.

6. Principal factors influencing the outcome: The PRI's main problem is to generate sufficient interest among an electorate made apathetic by the inevitability of the result to ensure a respectable vote turnout.

7. Significance for US security interests: Mexico's tolerance of Castro and of other Communist activities is of security importance to the US. However, such government policies are made at the top, and no deputy or governor has any real influence in forming these policies or could be expected to differ effectively from them.

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